

Memorandum for the Record

Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization

Pilot Transit Working Group Meeting Summary

March 19, 2021, Meeting

1:00 PM–3:00 PM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform

Meeting recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQtUk0KqQB0&t>

1. Welcome—*Tegin Teich, Executive Director, Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS), and Michelle Scott, MPO staff*

T. Teich welcomed attendees to the fourth Pilot Transit Working Group (TWG) meeting. She explained that MPO staff have two primary roles: to support the MPO in realizing its vision of a healthy, equitable, sustainable, and economically viable transportation system, and to provide technical and planning support to various partners in the region. Additional information on the MPO and CTPS can be found on the [Boston Region MPO website](#).

T. Teich stated that the goal of TWG meetings is to support coordination between transit providers and build stronger connections between transit providers and other transit stakeholders in the region with the MPO. Additional information on the Pilot TWG can be found on the [Boston Region MPO website](#).

T. Teich emphasized the importance of the TWG in the context of uncertainties and impacts resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The concept of the TWG is to encourage collaboration to advance public transit as the foundation of an equitable, sustainable, safe, and robust transportation system that meets the regions goals.

M. Scott provided an overview of the presentations for the meeting.

2. MPO Transit-Related Activities Update—*Paul Christner, Sandy Johnston, and Michelle Scott, MPO staff*

M. Scott discussed upcoming decisions regarding the [Transportation Improvement Program](#) (TIP). Many of the major investment decisions for capital projects, programs, and research and planning work frequently occur in the spring. Regarding the TIP, the MPO board is currently determining which transportation projects the MPO will fund over the next five years. TIP dollars are invested in transit in several ways, including the [Community Connections](#) program, which supports first and last-mile connections, and the Transit Modernization program, which supports improvements to transit amenities, station upgrades, and similar improvements. Roadway projects funded through the TIP also support transit. The MPO has recently worked to emphasize dedicated bus lanes,

transit signal priority, and transit mobility. The MPO board also approves the capital programming for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), the MetroWest Regional Transit Authority, and the Cape Ann Transportation Authority. M. Scott noted that the MPO's performance targets and the relationship between MPO-funded projects and performance improvements are included in the TIP document.

S. Johnston stated that the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) is the document that details how the MPO will allocate federal funds toward technical assistance, studies, and regional planning. The MPO board and MPO staff are currently working together to determine which studies should be funded in the federal fiscal year 2022. The development process will continue through May or June, and the document will be endorsed in July or August.

S. Johnston highlighted the Regional Travel Demand Management Strategies Coordination task in the UPWP. A recent result of this task was the [Travel Demand Management in a Post-COVID World panel discussion](#).

P. Christner noted the MPO's [Regional Transit Service Planning Technical Support](#) program, which provides technical support and planning related to routing, ridership, cost effectiveness, and other transit-related issues. Eligible applicants in regional transit authorities, transportation management associations, municipalities, and Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) subregions. He noted that the program can only support transit services available to the public.

P. Christner highlighted two active studies:

- Future of the Curb Phase Two, a continuation of the MPO's [Future of the Curb](#)
- The Transportation Recovery Guidebook for Commercial Business Districts

M. Scott announced that MPO staff will be complementing regularly held TWG meetings with shorter, small-group discussions. These meetings will be conversational and less formal than traditional meetings, with MPO staff facilitating discussion. The number of participants will be limited, with a degree of priority placed on transit providers, transit supporting agencies, and municipalities; however, MPO staff will work to accommodate as many participants as possible.

Discussion

Josh Ostroff praised the smaller-scale meetings initiative and suggested housing and zoning as potential topics.

Jennifer Glass asked if MPO staff would consider organizing the small-scale meetings around towns with Commuter Rail stations or adjacent communities. S. Johnston and M. Scott stated that this will be taken into consideration when planning these meetings.

Wig Zamore asked if MPO staff have conducted analyses of future travel demand from Lower Mystic Opportunity Zones. Brad Rawson stated that MPO staff were the technical lead on the mandated three-year Encore Casino regional working group. The working group saw a notable, positive transformation in Inner Core coordination on transportation and land use decisions in advancement of the MAPC land use plan for the Lower Mystic portion of Inner Core.

3. Transit Provider Items

There were none.

4. **MBTA Regional Rail**—*Rob DiAdamo, Executive Director of Commuter Rail, MBTA; Alistair Sawers, Director of Rail Transformation, MBTA; and Dave Walker, Director of Revenue and Marketing, Keolis*

The presentation provided by A. Sawers is available on the [Boston Region MPO website](#).

A. Sawers gave an introduction about regional/urban rail transformation. While much emphasis has been placed on electrification, transformation is about delivering service to the end user; every change implemented by the MBTA is intended to deliver a service improvement. RailVision began with several goals:

- Match service with growth and changing needs of the region
- Enhance economic vitality
- Improve passenger experience
- Provide an equitable and balanced suite of investments
- Achieve climate change and sustainability targets
- Maximize return on investments

The RailVision study exercise included systematic outreach with the aim of prioritizing these goals. Overall, the original goals were retained, though they have grown more nuanced in response to the potential long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A. Sawers provided an overview of the service concepts of rail transformation.

Regional rail would consist of:

- Clock-face scheduling, under which trains run under consistent intervals rather than a fixed schedule. This will improve the ease of both taking the Commuter Rail and making a connection with an additional transit service. The MBTA hopes that 20-to-30-minute headways for trains become more practical and allow for improved bus connections.
- A split between local and express service. Local service would provide all-day, bi-directional service with 20-to-30-minute headways, while express service would provide nonstop or skip-stop service to communities on the outer edges of the MBTA service area, potentially focused on peak demand.

Urban rail would be similar to subway service. This service would be provided inside of Route 128 and I-95, with 15-to-20-minute bi-directional headways and a rapid fare pay structure.

A. Sawers outlined the first phase of Fiscal and Management Control Board resolution on rail transformation. This phase will consist of focusing on the Providence Line as regional rail trial and the Fairmount Line as urban rail trial. The goal is to largely electrify these lines, although the precise dispersal of technology (catenary vs. battery) has not been determined. He noted that the Providence Line is already electrified. These changes will be accompanied by integrating bus and rapid transit schedules, improving parking and first- and last-mile connections, and providing accessible high-level platforms at Commuter Rail stations. The MBTA will begin with a business case for phase one of rail transformation but will simultaneously study the feasibility of an electrical multiple unit (EMU) pilot on the northeast corridor of the Commuter Rail system. He noted that the MBTA is not solely focusing on phase one, but rather on the whole system.

A. Sawers referred to [a slide in his presentation that demonstrates the MBTA's holistic approach to rail transformation](#). He presented a [timeline of rail transformation](#), noting that the major infrastructure components will take some time to implement. However, the Commuter Rail's fleet will require replacement in approximately 2030; given the time between procurement and manufacturing, decisions regarding the future fleet will need to be made in the near term.

D. Walker stated that Spring 2021 Commuter Rail schedule is intended to achieve two goals. The first goal is to move as many lines as possible toward the outcome of RailVision. The second goal is to rebalance service throughout the day to cater to the changes in travel patterns while, in part, reducing operating costs. The pandemic

continues to result in much working from home and traveling outside of peak hours. He noted that the slight reduction in the number of trains operating during peak hours results in more trains operating during the middle of the day.

D. Walker explained the communications focus regarding the Spring 2021 schedule prior to its implementation. The MBTA and Keolis will focus on making riders aware of new journey opportunities; explain that Commuter Rail schedules do not reflect pre-COVID schedules; emphasize flexible fare options, such as the 5-Day FlexPass; and reinforce that the Commuter Rail is still safe to use. He stated that Keolis and the MBTA hope that stakeholders will promote the new schedule and trip options and encouraged stakeholders to reach out for additional information.

Discussion

Susan Barrett asked about the anticipated timeline for increased frequencies on the Fitchburg Line. A. Sawers stated that the immediate plan is to focus on stations close to Boston, in order to implement urban rail after Phase One; this would be in the 2030-to-2035-time range. R. DiAdamo stated that rail transformation will be an iterative process. The MBTA seeks to continuously improve Commuter Rail lines, and users will hopefully see improvements with each new schedule prior to major transformation.

Brian Kane asked if there are existing EMUs in the United States that meet current Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) collision standards, and what type of vehicle the MBTA envisions procuring. A. Sawers stated that FRA standards have changed, resulting in lighter, European-style vehicles being procured by US transit agencies. He noted Caltrain's procurement of Stadler KISS variants and New Jersey Transit's procurement of Bombardier Multilevel III vehicles. R. DiAdamo stated that an increased number of manufacturers will result in competitive pricing.

A. Sawers acknowledged that dual-mode locomotives (which can be powered by either diesel or electricity) and fully electric locomotives currently exist. However, he noted these models generally do not achieve the level of acceleration required to fulfill the short gaps between some of the Commuter Rail stations.

B. Kane expressed that the lack of a maintenance facility on the south side of the Commuter Rail has stymied progress toward rail transformation. He asked how the MBTA plans to address this. R. DiAdamo stated that the Fleet and Facilities study will guide the MBTA on this issue. He stated that having a service facility on the south side would be beneficial, as the majority of service is on the south side. He noted that the Commuter Rail's largest facility is on the north side.

R. DiAdamo added that newer locomotives are significantly different from the current Commuter Rail fleet, and upgrading the fleet will require training current operators on new equipment.

J. Glass asked how the MBTA plans to allocate federal stimulus funds. R. DiAdamo stated the MBTA will allocate funds where they are most needed. For example, buses have traditionally been the most overcrowded transit mode in the Boston region. The MBTA also wants to be in an ideal position to reintroduce and expand service on the Commuter Rail as ridership levels increase following the pandemic. He added that given the Commuter Rail's low ridership during the pandemic, reintroducing service provides an opportunity to change previous service patterns, such as additional express or local trains.

R. DiAdamo noted that discussions of updated service patterns predate the pandemic, and that the discussion of what Commuter Rail service "should become" is an aspect of RailVision. He reiterated the goal of consistent, all-day service with predictable headways.

A. Sawers stated that the MBTA's intent is to serve all markets in a more effective way than previously delivered, such as short-leg trips and reverse commutes.

Matt Moran emphasized the importance of the Fairmount Line, noting that one in five Bostonians lives within a 10-minute walk of the line, and many communities along the corridor are communities where equity is a concern. He stated that the City of Boston is discussing how to adjust roadway travel to accommodate bus improvements and transit signal priority, and the decisions made could impact the Fairmount Line. He expressed enthusiasm for working the MBTA on future improvements. R. DiAdamo stated that the City of Boston has been a great partner of the MBTA. He stated that the MBTA is excited to transform the Fairmount Line in the longer term, as well as improve service with the upcoming schedule. He stated that the Spring 2021 schedule will have approximately 85 percent more trains on the Fairmount Line than the Fall 2019 schedule. He added that improved service on the Fairmount Line could reduce ridership on overcrowded bus routes.

A participant asked via Zoom chat how the MBTA plans to interact with freight rail when frequencies grow. R. DiAdamo stated freight is a constant; every line has a freight provider who has operating rights, though the level of freight traffic varies. The MBTA works with freight operators to ensure coordinated operations. He stated that his office is scheduling a monthly meeting of railroad operators to ensure coordination.

A. Sawers pointed to the Lowell Line as an example of improvements that can benefit both freight and the Commuter Rail. Overall, by improving its Commuter Rail network, the MBTA is limiting conflicts with freight. He acknowledged that there is much interaction with freight on the Fitchburg Line, and that the Grand Junction, which is used to move cars from the north to the south side, will remain as a single track. In reference to B. Kane's comments, he stated that a south-side maintenance facility would reduce overall traffic on the Grand Junction line.

B. Kane asked if the existing electrical grid could sustain multiple EMU trips on multiple lines. A. Sawers stated that the MBTA is discussing this issue with National Grid and Eversource as part of its planning for the northeast corridor. Electric companies are currently reaching out to potential users as the use of electric vehicles (EV) expands, and, in turn, exploring ways to improve their facilities.

R. DiAdamo stated that there will be a challenge as other companies and agencies vie for access to the grid. However, the MBTA is a large stakeholder and will hopefully be able to direct policies moving forward.

A participant asked how the MBTA plans to improve stations. A. Sawers stated that the priority for station improvements are operational improvements. As such, upgrading stations to have high-level platforms is a high priority, as it will improve boarding speed and reduce dwell times. Station access is a large program, though securing funds is a challenge; as such, the MBTA seeks to partner with other agencies to explore off-site options including regional transit, pedestrian, bicycle, and car solutions. For the latter, he stated that EV facilities at Commuter Rail parking could be a possible accommodation.

Carole McNair asked about potential improvements to Gloucester Station, expressing that the station's infrastructure is deteriorating. A. Sawers acknowledged the condition of Gloucester Station, stating that the MBTA acknowledges the state of the station. The MBTA is seeking ways to fund improvements at stations such as Gloucester, whether through station art or station brightening.

Alon Levy asked why a 45-minute frequency is proposed for the Fairmount Line. They noted that the Fairmount Line is an approximately 30-minute trip between terminals. R. DiAdamo stated that as regional rail expands, the MBTA will be able to improve headways. Deadhead trips and inspections will always affect trip times to some extent. D. Walker stated that the Fairmount Line will have eight more trains per day than previously scheduled. Setting the schedule was a balance of frequency and efficiency. A 45-minute pattern on the Fairmount Line can be maintained with two sets of trains. He

confirmed that there are requirements for track patrols, and the service must allow time to accommodate this, as the inspection requires a vehicle to move along the tracks. D. Walker summarized the headways by stating that, while there were a number of factors, the goal of MBTA and Keolis was to provide the best service with the available equipment given the overall funding challenge.

A. Sawers noted that the single-track section at the end of the Fairmount Line slows the final turn of each train; he added that the MBTA is working to improve this. D. Walker noted that a pilot of increased service of the Fairmount Line began in May 2020. Keolis and the MBTA Customer Experience Team promoted the service through digital media and community outreach. He stated that increased ridership would make increased frequency more easily justifiable.

Linda Hager asked if parking at Commuter Rail stations will be addressed. A. Sawers stated that parking improvements are a component of rail transformation, with a mixed approach including pricing-based, technology-based, and parking lot capacity. He stated that the approach to each station will vary based on area and typology; park-and-ride stations, city center stations, and more walkable stations will be addressed differently. The MBTA will examine pre-COVID capacity and usage at parking lots and assess best future uses, such as using some parking property of transit-oriented development or improving bus access to stations. He emphasized that the MBTA will assess each station's needs and potential future use individually. R. DiAdamo stated that while parking is a component of station access, the MBTA seeks to provide access to stations through multiple modes and works to improve bicycle and pedestrian access.

Clark Frazier expressed concern regarding the single-track section of the Greenbush Line and how increased peak service would affect traffic on the line. He asked if trains could split, as they do at Braintree and Quincy. A. Sawers acknowledged that the single track on the Greenbush Line is a significant issue. The MBTA is considering plans to remediate this issue with existing equipment. D. Walker stated that while splitting trains is a valid idea, it would require large capital investment to provide multiple locomotives to a given set.

J. Ostroff asked about the implications of transformation investment given the one-year Capital Investment Program (CIP). R. DiAdamo expressed that regardless of how the CIP is framed, whether it be one or five years, the MBTA will continue its rail transformation efforts, adding that a one-year CIP would not hinder its efforts.

5. Boston Region MPO's MBTA Park-and-Ride and Bicycle Parking Dashboard—*Ryan Hicks, MPO staff*

The [Park-and-Ride and Bicycle Parking Dashboard](#), and its [accompanying memo](#), are available on the MPO website.

R. Hicks stated that the data collection effort leading to the park-and-ride dashboard is the latest iteration of a 20-year process of data collection for the Congestion Management Process (CMP). Previous data collection efforts first occurred in 2000, and subsequently in 2005, 2006, 2009, 2010, and 2013. The latest data collection effort occurred in 2017 and 2018.

The purpose of the data collection was to evaluate park-and-ride capacity and use of spaces available for the general public; this excludes permanent parking. The dashboard seeks to appeal to members of the public who need a parking spot at the last moment and wish to pay a sum of money to park at a specific parking lot. Permit-only parking data are collected, though analyzed separately; these data can be found in the above-mentioned memo. In addition to parking data, staff analyze the accessibility of stations; data points include ramp access to station platforms, accessible parking spaces near the station, and sidewalks and crosswalks leading to the station. Staff also studied the origin of trips to park-and-ride lots.

R. Hicks stated that given limited resources, data collection consisted of one-day samples at each study location. Given this limitation, staff seek to collect data on representative days, which include non-holiday Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, typically in the spring or fall. Staff examine each station after the last inbound peak period train leaves the station.

MPO staff collected automobile parking data at 152 MBTA stations and bicycle parking data at every station within the MBTA system. In addition, staff collected data on station amenities, including bicycle and pedestrian connection to the station.

R. Hicks noted that all terminal stations on rapid transit lines are full at the end of the morning peak period, with the exception of Riverside and Mattapan.

R. Hicks provided a demo of the Park-and-Ride and Bicycle Parking Dashboard. He credited MPO staff members Margaret Atkinson and Benjamin Krepp for creating the dashboard. The demo provided by R. Hicks is available on the [MPO's YouTube channel](#).

Discussion

Sarah Lee asked how the MPO's dashboard compares to the MassDOT Mobility Dashboard, which includes 2019 versus 2020 versus 2021 parking comparisons. R. Hicks speculated that the major difference is that data used by MassDOT were supplied directly by the MBTA, and as such would only include data on parking lots owned by the MBTA, while the data used by the MPO included private lots. In addition, MPO staff collected data during the morning peak period to establish the needs of commuters, while the MBTA collects data throughout the day.

6. Closing and Next Steps

M. Scott stated that attendees will receive a post-meeting email containing links to the various resources discussed during the meeting, as well as a post-event survey and information regarding upcoming events.

Attendance

Attendee Name	Attendee Affiliation
Zachary Agush	RIPTA
Jonathan Ahn	AECOM
Susan Albright	Newton
Caitlin Allen-Connelly	A Better City
Glenn Ann Geiler	Brockton Area Transit
Colette Aufranc	Wellesley
Michael Baker	
Susan Barrett	InnerWest RCC
Louise Baxter	T Riders Union
Jeff Bennett	128 Business Council
Adam Bindas	
Nikole Bulger	STV Inc
Brendan Casey	MBTA
Angela Constantino	GATRA
Stephanie Cronin	Middlesex 3 Coalition
Jeffrey DeCarlo	MassDOT
Rob DiAdamo	MBTA
Lenard Diggins	MBTA Rider Oversight Committee
Lucia Dolan	Green Newton
Karen Dumaine	Neponset Valley RCC
Marc Ebuña	RIPTA
Wes Edwards	MBTA
Michele Ellicks	MassDOT
Johannes Epke	CLF
Ethan Finlan	Transit Matters
Kelly Forrester	Brockton Area Transit
Maria Foster	Brookline
AC Fragoso	BSCE
Clark Frazier	
James Freas	Natick
Sophia Galimore	Watertown TMA
Jaime Garmendia	MBTA
Jim Gascoigne	Charles River TMA
Jennifer Glass	Lincoln

Attendee Name	Attendee Affiliations
Courtney Goldberg	Transaction Associates
Joshua Grzegorzewski	MassDOT
Linda Hager	Prime AE Group
Robert Hale	
Jon Hamilton	MA House of Representatives
Jack Harman	Bay Area Transit Authority
	South Shore Housing Development Corporation
John Hixson	
Brian Kane	MBTA Advisory Board
Todd Kirrane	Brookline
Joshua Klingenstein	MBTA
David Koses	Newton
Michael Lambert	Brockton Area Transit
Aniko Laszlo	MBTA
Andrea Leary	Assembly Connect TMA
Sarah Lee	MAPC
Chavella Lee-Pacheco	Madison Park Development Corporation
Alon Levy	Transit Matters
Michael Littman	Howard Stein Hudson
Peter Lowitt	
Owen MacDonald	Weymouth
Bonnie Mahoney	
Carole McNair	SeniorCare Elder Services
William Meehan	
David Montgomery	RTAC
Matt Moran	Boston
Benjamin Muller	MassDOT
Aileen O'Rourke	NSTMA
Jane Obbagy	Obbagy Consulting
Steven Olanoff	Westwood
Franny Osman	Acton
Josh Ostroff	T4MA
Jason Palitsch	495 MetroWest Partnership
Matthew Palm	Worcester State University
Cayla Paulding	
Travis Pollack	MAPC
Brad Rawson	Somerville
Lee Remi	MBTA

Attendee Name	Attendee Affiliations
T Roy	Wellesley University
Aneesh Sahni	MA Senate
Alistair Sawers	MBTA
Gregory Sobczynski	MassDOT
Patrick Sullivan	Seaport TMA
Abby Swaine	EPA
Jon Thibault	MA Senate
Justin Thompson	Keolis
Dave Walker	Keolis
	EOHHS Human Service Transportation Office
Lisa Weber	
Vanessa White	MBTA
Laura Wiener	Watertown
Matt Wismer	
Darlene Wynne	Beverly
Wig Zamore	STEP
Michael Zeevi	Suffolk University
Laura Wiener	Watertown
Matt Wismer	

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Tegin Teich, Executive Director
Annette Demchur, Director of Policy and Planning
Matt Archer
Paul Christner
Róisín Foley
Matt Genova
Ryan Hicks
Sandy Johnston
Michelle Scott
Kate White

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